Opinion: Ex-electeds want to stay at public trough

By Larry Weitzman

For the past year and a half I have followed the county government machinations fairly closely, but prior to that time my interactions with the county were somewhat limited. There were a few supervisors who were less than impressive, but there were some good ones. Also impressive were some department heads. When I built a house 10 years ago the building and safety department was very helpful in every respect.

But things have gone downhill since then and it's due to poor county leadership, starting right at the top. In February termed out BOS member **Ron Briggs** filed a claim for "back wages," saying he wasn't paid the correct amount of salary as a member of the BOS by $178,333. Briggs has gone through some rough times, with personal foreclosures and with only a high school diploma and being nearly 58 years old his after government employment prospects don't look very good. On top of that recent domestic issues haven't helped. The filing of this bogus claim could be evidence of his desperate situation. Briggs was foreclosed out of his home and is renting a home near El Dorado Hills. Is he planning a run for supervisor in another district?


Larry Weitzman

In his quest to be elected county treasurer, a position according to Government Code Section 27000.7 he was statutorily unqualified for, never mind being qualified to collect and invest a billion dollars for the county and local agencies. One of Briggs' moves as a supervisor was to create county salary levels for the elected department heads and in doing so remove incentive pay, like for being a CPA. It wouldn't affect Briggs if he won the office of county treasurer as he doesn't have such a professional license, but it would have hurt the then county treasurer who won re-election. But in doing so (the resolution was later repealed) he created another county snafu by adding out-of-county work credit toward salary and longevity pay for county employees. The correction was supposed to be made by HR (whose director benefits from this uncorrected snafu) several months ago, but is now two months overdue. Without the correction, it could cost the county hundreds of thousand dollars.

Because of the Briggs claim, it was recently reported that **Norma Santiago**, ex-District 5 supervisor, has filed an identical claim. During her tenure on the board Santiago supported ex- spendthrift CAO Terri Day through Daly's hiring binge, series of expensive raises (15 percent) and some of the worst hiring decisions in county history, all done without proper background checks. Daly hired high level department people who were basically unemployable elsewhere all with the transparency of a brick wall lined with krypton. Santiago supported Daly to the end, saying on her dismissal that Daly was the "loyal champion of EDC employees. " Daly was supposed to work for the taxpayers and citizens of EDC.

By the way, in my several columns on the budget this year's closing numbers were worse than I predicted for salary and benefits by $3 million at $144.7 million or almost $27 million more than the average salaries and benefits paid ($118 million) for the FY 2010 to 2013. Next fiscal year when the full effect of the 15 percent raise kicks in, salaries and benefits will have climbed to over $150 million. Santiago did a great job along with the allegedly conservative Briggs in giving away other people's money.

Santiago and Briggs are currently understood to be unemployed.

As to their bogus claims, they are meritless as all the county raises they are referring to were the result of county resolutions. But the California Constitution in Article II, Section 4(b) requires "that all legislative action taken with regard to a board member's salary must be adopted via a duly noticed ordinance." That quote was from a county counsel letter dated July 30 to Briggs' attorney.

Santiago's claim was also denied, but an email inquiry by Santiago could lead one to believe perhaps there might have been a quid pro quo between certain county employees and Santiago to the effect that if you file a claim, there would be a quick settlement. The email was to County Counsel Robyn Drivon. It stated, "This is just a quick follow up on that claim. Additionally, I would like to know how close you are to a resolution as we are quickly approaching the 30 days you had hoped this would be cleared up. Live long and prosper. May the force be with you! Take care, Norma." A "resolution in 30 days?" Sounds like a deal to me.

And if that don't beat all, the infamous Ray Nutting filed a claim for damages against EDC for "malicious prosecution/abuse of process" and other torts because was acquitted by a jury on some charges brought by a criminal grand jury and filed jointly by the state Attorney General's Office and the EDC District Attorney. Although Nutting was acquitted of some of the charges, had a hung jury on a felony and was found guilty on some misdemeanors, the criminal grand jury indictment creates probable cause and bars the filing of a civil suit. There is more to this story and that will come later.

When you have politicians who had real jobs before election and being a politician isn't their only job or source of income, it makes for politicians that have limited or no self-interest. The founding fathers envisioned our republic in the same fashion, part-time legislators with real jobs on the outside, not politicians who become dependent on being politicians.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.